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ABSTRACT

This series, designed for use in inservice teacher workshops, addresses the question, "How do children and teachers use language to get things done?" The transcribed classroom discourse presented and discussed in each volume illustrates functional language in a real context based on the videotaping of undoctored classroom events from kindergarten and grades 1 to 3. Each manual contains workshop exercises to be used with the videotape, describes the theoretical framework from which the work stems, and includes verbal transcripts of the language used in the tapes. The present volume focuses on what has been conventionally considered "down time" by educators. It is demonstrated that transitions can function as an actual learning event, socially and cognitively. (Author/JB)

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TRANSITIONS: ACTIVITY BETWEEN ACTIVITIES

Participant's Manual

Stephen R. Cahir
Ceil Kovac

EXPLORING FUNCTIONAL LANGUAGE
Stephen R. Cahir, Series Coordinator

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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FOREWORD

Exploring Functional Language is a unique set of materials that addresses what is probably the most important question one could ask about language use in the schools: "How do children and teachers use language to get things done?" However obvious such a question may seem, it is unfortunately true that we seldom ask it. Instead, the schools usually try to determine such questions as "How correct is the usage of the children?" or "How mature is the children's language development in terms of pronunciation or grammar?" These are not unimportant questions, but they focus only on the *forms* of language rather than on its *functions*. That is, the questions address the social judgments we can make about language (is it correct or not) rather than the cognitive functions (what does the language get done).

These protocol tapes and manuals effectively illustrate functional language in its real, classroom context with videotapes of the undoctored, actual classroom events. The manuals contain workshop exercises to be used with the videotape, describe (in clear language) the theoretical framework from which the work stems, and include verbal transcripts of the language used in the tapes. All videotape samples (15 to 20 minutes in length) were taken from a large research project conducted at the Center for Applied Linguistics (Peg Griffin and Roger Shuy, *Children's Functional Language and Education in the Early Years*, 1978). Separate manuals accompany each videotape.

A Way with Words describes the principle of functional language in some detail, calling into question conventional school language assessment which deals only with language forms (sounds, vocabulary and grammar) while often ignoring meaning relationships (semantics) and language use (pragmatics).

What's What with Questions explores the use of question asking strategies in the classroom. It points out that questions do a great deal more work than merely getting information. Children have a variety of ways to use questions and this protocol suggests ways that educators can make use of them for in-service or pre-service training. *It's Your Turn* provides information about the verbal and non-verbal aspects of classroom turns at talking, when it succeeds as well as when it breaks down. *Transitions: Activity between Activities* focuses on what has been conventionally considered "down time" by educators. The videotape and manual describe how transitions can function as an actual learning event, socially and cognitively. A similar focus is presented in *When Is Reading?*, which illustrates visually that learning how to read extends far beyond "official" reading time in classrooms. Although much of the focus of these videotapes and manuals is on children's functional language use, teacher talk is also noted, especially in *Teacher Talk Works*, a visible demonstration of talk that teaches, answers, evaluates, manages, and reprimands.

There is no way that a brief overview of this sort can capture the richness of the actual videotaped events in this series. That is precisely the reason, in fact, that the authors decided to present this important information in protocol form. These are *not* books about children's functional language. They *are* children's functional language, captured in natural, real life settings, selected from hundreds of hours of research samples and presented in a way which is convincing, clear and dynamic.

Roger Shuy

INTRODUCTION

☆ **What is meant by *transition* and why is it called the *activity between activities*?**

☆ **How are transitions accomplished in school?**

☆ **What effects does transitional activity have on other classroom activities?**

☆ **What effects can it have?**

☆ **Why is it useful to understand what goes on at moments of transition?**

☆ **How does the material in this booklet relate to my classroom?**

The preceding are some of the questions that will be dealt with in the materials that follow. This participant's manual is part of a packet that includes an accompanying instructor's manual and a videotape entitled *Transitions: Activity between Activities*. These materials result from a research project that examined children's language and social behavior in school. The videotape presents excerpts from actual classroom events that clearly illustrate some of the interesting and intricate workings of the school day. Both manuals offer discussions of the tape's major points and provide background information for those who wish to pursue a particular topic further. Also, each manual suggests exercises and activities that will sharpen and personalize your understanding of the topics covered. We hope that you will find these materials relevant and useful to your own teaching experiences.

SUGGESTIONS FOR USING THESE MATERIALS

The discussion and exercise sections of this manual are designed to be flexible and interchangeable, to accommodate individual learning styles, time schedules, and your own goals.

If you are a participant using this manual in pre-service or in-service training, your instructor will plan a workshop based on these materials. **If you are working on your own,** you may find either of the following approaches helpful or you may wish to devise one of your own.

The transcript reflects the contents of the videotape. Satisfactory work can be done with this manual when the videotape is not available.

OPTION A

(1) Read through the transcript. We suggest this as the first step for any approach, since it is often difficult to read while listening to and watching the tape at the same time.

(2) Look at the tape, if available.

(3) Read the discussion section.

(4) Read the "Theory and Methods" section (optional).

(5) Do at least the following exercises:

I. Section A #1-4
Section B #1, 2
Section C #1, 2

(6) Do as many of the remaining exercises as possible, rereading the discussion section as appropriate or necessary.

OPTION B

(1) Read through the transcript.

(2) Look at tape, if available.

(3) Do the following exercises:

I. Section A #1-4
Section B #1, 2
Section C #1, 2

(4) Read the discussion section.

(5) Read the "Theory and Methods" section (optional).

(6) Do as many of the remaining exercises as possible, rereading the discussion section as appropriate or necessary.

DISCUSSION

This discussion section is intended mainly as a point of reference for persons participating in workshops or classes based on these materials; however, issues raised here also can serve as departure points for further discussion or as a basis for assignments.

THE MAIN IDEAS

Now that you have looked at the videotape and/or read through the transcript, it is useful to talk about the ideas developed in those materials. There are three basic issues:

(1) The nature of transition: What it looks like.
(2) The function of transition: What it does.
(3) The signals to transition: How it is done.

The Nature of Transition

Transition: 1. The process or an instance of changing from one form, state, activity or place to another. 2. Passage from one subject to another, as in discourse. . . . (The American Heritage Dictionary, 1969)

This definition is a good place to begin our examination of the nature of transitional activity in the classroom. The word *process* is a key to understanding what transitions look like, and, as the title of this booklet indicates, this process is the *activity between activities*. There is little disagreement that the main intent of schooling is the instruction that takes place during lesson time. But what about those in-between times? Since both transition and teaching are describable as *processes*, an obvious question might be: How do you decide where one leaves off and the other begins? Because certain characteristics of transitional times typically appear to indicate a change of focus, let us look at some of them and the roles that they play in school.

The first is a *marked increase of noise*. Think about what happens at the end of a show or a church service as everyone prepares to leave: almost immediately each person turns to a friend or neighbor to make a comment or express an opinion about what has just occurred. At the same time, people frequently take this moment to make plans for the next event—where to go and how to get there. The situation in the classroom is similar; the noise level does rise, often disrupting the activities of others and presenting problems for the teacher, who is responsible for maintaining a sense of order.

Related to this noise, and frequently a major cause of it, is *an increase in the amount of random movement*. As it appears that a lesson is ending, the class becomes uneasy. Students gather their things, squirm in their seats, and generally cue the teacher that their attention is waning. At this point, teachers struggle to bring the lesson to a close by summarizing what has

been covered and by situating the information within the larger issues of what has been taught and where the topic is going next. While the closing moments of a lesson are critical to its effectiveness, the class is frequently least receptive then.

A third feature of transitional time is *the number of topics that spring up*. The shared focus of the group—the lesson topic—is breaking up. The teacher may rapidly give sets of instructions to get everyone on to the next activity on the schedule. Students, on the other hand, may use these moments to take care of their own business—for example, to ask questions or make comments that were clearly inappropriate during the lesson. (We say this not to criticize these students' concerns but to highlight the fact that transitions are busy, challenging moments for all involved.) The teacher's job is to coordinate all of these activities.

While none of these characteristics is particularly earth-shaking, each has led teachers to devise ways to minimize possible disruptiveness. Some of those techniques will be examined in a later section of this booklet and are evident on the videotape you have seen. Here, one further point must be made. Every aspect of schooling is a cooperative endeavor and cooperation requires flexibility. Teachers have responsibility for instilling a sense of social cooperation in their students, along with more academic goals of education. Classroom management is a familiar topic and is most often treated strictly as the teacher's task. Our research on transitional behavior has confirmed that management of the classroom is best treated as a *group* responsibility.

During any school day, occasions arise when students and teachers must *negotiate* with one another. Specifically regarding transitional times, moments occur when a pupil's or pupils' needs do not coincide with the teacher's plans. Students often try to have their present needs met, sometimes at the expense of activities around them. They ask to be excused, introduce a new topic, or return to a former topic. As with Peter in the nursery school tape excerpt, they have an "insurmountable" problem demanding an immediate resolution. Peter's teacher has devised a method that allows him to call for a class meeting. Rather than being passive recipients of the teacher's plans, students in this class actively engage in classroom decisions.

In summary, transition to new activities can be of two types: those for which the teacher has scheduled in a lesson plan or daily plan and those which occur to meet the particular needs of the day. Both types demand adaptation and flexibility on everyone's part if the cooperative process of education is to occur.

The Functions of Transition

Up to this point, we have been primarily describing transitional behavior in terms of what it looks like, sounds like and the roles classroom members might play. Now let's turn to the functions that transition serves and how the *way* a transition is accomplished affects the activities around it. To get an idea of how this happens, consider the way people end or close an event. The way a person closes an interaction indicates that person's interpretation of what was going on. For example, it indicates of the level of formality that the person believes to have been appropriate during the encounter. "Bye-bye" suffices for a friend; "good to see you again" is used for

an acquaintance; "nice to meet you," for a first meeting; and "this court is adjourned," for trial proceedings. Closings, then, establish an attitude through which to view the event that has been closed.

What does all this have to do with transitions? The answer is relatively simple. Rather than "looking back" as closings do, transitions "look forward" by establishing an attitude for the *next* activity and by predisposing the group to that next activity. Given this function of transition, teachers have come up with transitional routines which are reflective of the tone of the upcoming event. Fire drill signals are responded to with the utmost seriousness. On the other hand, children on their way to music or dance class might be encouraged to "dance like bears."

A second analogy, the similarity between interruptions and transitions, is also useful in understanding the functions of transition. Educationally speaking, transitions might well be viewed as interruptions in the flow of the school day; this might account for the fact that transitional time is frequently equated with "downtime" or "time-off-task". Research on interruptions has pointed out that interruptive behavior lacks a clear, neat closing. In fact, an "official" closing of an interruption is contrary to the basic notion of what an interruption is: "unofficially" breaking in upon an action or discourse. Finding the "official" end of a transition is equally difficult. Like interruptions, transitions are meant to last only as long as is necessary. Perhaps the only way to mark the end of a transition is to note the beginning of the next activity. The signals that indicate the beginning of a transition are somewhat easier to locate, as discussed in the next section.

The Signals to Transition

The discussion thus far has concerned the general characteristics of transition and their effects on the flow of activity of the school day. Turning to those aspects of language that surround transition, we can see certain verbal and nonverbal cues in the situation signal an upcoming change of focus. Perhaps the most common signal is *time*. At those grade levels where children have learned to tell time, this is frequently the only cue necessary. Schedules that break up the day into time periods are generally of two types:

(1) The first are the daily routines that quickly become established in each classroom. Their sequence is learned early in the year, and students come to expect them automatically.
(2) The teacher's unit plans and daily plans are a second type of scheduling. Many teachers let the class know first thing in the morning (as part of the opening exercises or first circle) what the plans are for the day. Other teachers reserve spaces on the blackboard or bulletin board where a written schedule is posted. This, of course, requires that the class be able to read or that the schedule be read to them.

The second type of cue to transition is frequently an *activity* or series of *activities* which must get done before the class can move on—such as pick-up and clean-up times when materials must be put away and tables washed. Lining up is another activity that usually indicates upcoming transition. It is possible to see lining up, cleaning up, picking up, and the like as classroom procedures without referring to their role as cues for transition. However, if you ask the students involved in

such an activity what they are doing, their answers will more than likely refer to what has just been completed or what is next on the agenda. "I just finished my Christmas decoration" or "We're getting ready to go outside." Their answers let you know that they rightfully see these as in-between times in preparation for the next activity.

Nonverbal *signals* that quiet the group down comprise a third type of cue to transition. Silence is almost always required before any transition. Once the group is quieted and paying attention, they may receive a set of instructions from the teacher, or they may already know what to do. Some familiar nonverbal cues include: lowering the lights or flicking them on and off, placing the index finger across pursed lips, or ringing bells.

The final type is the *verbal cue*, which invariably accompanies each of the other signals in some form. Examples include:

"While I close the doors, you can all put your coats on."
"We'll all go to lunch after we've picked up the room."
"Before your dress rehearsal I want everyone to sit quietly for a moment or two."

These sentences, taken from our research sample of teacher talk, share three features in common: (1) They all refer to activities which are to happen at the same time or sequentially; (2) each contains instructions for the class to execute; and (3) each precedes a transition. These verbal cues are usually characterized by verbal elements which capture and maintain the class' attention:

Imperatives: wait, stop, listen
Vocatives: folks, boys and girls, class
Temporals: now, in five minutes, this period
Miscellaneous: Well, O.K., alright

The four different types of cues—time, activities, signals, verbal cues—frequently occur in combinations. For example, at noon, lunch may be *multiply cued* by the time itself, by washing hands, by lining up, and by an announcement of what is on the menu. Since many of the daily routines become increasingly simplified as the year passes or as students get older, a noon whistle, for example, may be the only signal necessary to alert everyone that it is time to eat. While the necessity for multiple cueing may decrease in these cases, unscheduled transitions may still require special signals or verbal instructions. Thus the age of the students (i.e. familiarity with the school setting), the nature of the transition (i.e. scheduled vs. unscheduled), and the complexity of the upcoming activity (i.e. changing locale vs. changing topic) all play a part in regulating the activity between activities.

SPECIFIC DISCUSSION

Introduction

The opening sequences of this tape show various transitional points throughout the day and some of the procedures that are used in one particular school. Children arriving by school bus are greeted by a teacher who sends them to their respective classes. There the day's schedule, with

activities and times, is either written on the blackboard or announced by the teacher. Lessons are linked together by a succession of transitions to new topics, new activities, and new places. Some transitions require special preparations, such as matching brown gloves to their rightful owner before a recess in the snow. At the day's end, students leave with the day's booty and a "good-bye" from the teacher.

None of these activities is particularly unusual to anyone. Transition times are simply times after one event has ended and before the next has begun. In spite of this "inbetween times" status, transitions must be executed smoothly so that the work of teaching and learning can happen. To ensure this, teachers must see to it that students have the necessary social skills, that these skills are firmly established and that they are mutually agreed upon. However, lesson plans and daily plans rarely address transition explicitly; these times are most frequently the white space between the individual items on the day's agenda.

Signaling Transition with the Teacher's Signal

This segment highlights several of the points made in the general discussion. To begin this discussion, let us examine some of the characteristics particularly relevant to Peter's call for a class meeting. The class is involved in making decorations for the Christmas tree. As with most children his age, Peter is particularly concerned about what is going to happen to *his* decoration. Is it going to be put on the tree? When? Can he take it home? When? Faced with these problems, Peter goes to the usual source of resolution in these matters, his teacher. She sees his question as a genuine concern but also seems to realize that it affects the group and requires a group decision. Because the class meeting is a mechanism for making such decisions, the teacher asks: "Peter, do you want to call a meeting?" Peter takes this question as an invitation to call the group together at that moment and does so.

This teacher has created a signal—a "boop" sound, high pitched and repeated one or two times—to call a class meeting. By this time of the year (December), everyone in the class knows what the signal means: They are to drop what they are doing, go immediately to the rug area, and await quietly the beginning of the meeting. From the point when Peter "boops," the pace of the worktable activity picks up considerably. Students vie for the teacher's attention and for getting or continuing their turns at the table. The teacher, however, has switched her role as the main focus of activity to a supportive position.

Teacher: ". . . did you hear the boop—did you hear Peter boop?
What does that mean?"

These reminders, in question form, are said at full voice to the entire class. Peter has used a teacher-established signal to get the group together. The teacher must see to it that the class responds to Peter's call just as they would to her use of her signal. She reinforces the meaning of the "boop" to insure its future effectiveness as well as to help with Peter's immediate request for a meeting. In addition to these verbal reminders, the teacher helps by herding the students to the rug, the area designated as the class meeting place.

A few pupils are slow to arrive, but with some teacher prodding everyone makes it. The group is gathered around Peter and the teacher, who are ready to present the topic of the meeting. At this moment, the noise quiets down and the teacher reclaims her position as leader by stating Peter's problem. This simultaneously marks the end of the transition and the beginning of the next event.

It seems reasonable to assume that this particular class meeting was not on the teacher's plans for the day's events. It also seems reasonable to view the move to the meeting area as an interruption in the activities at the worktable. This is clear from the number of student protests: "Oh, I'm not finished!" The question of whether time spent in this way is "time off task," in the sense of time not spent teaching or learning, is another issue. Much has been written about the social development that must necessarily accompany children's academic development. The social aspects of education are treated less overtly in a curriculum traditionally designed with a heavy emphasis on the academic. Transitional moments offer naturally occurring times when cooperativeness, consideration for others, and participation in the concerns of the class become the focus of the class.

Viewed from this perspective, this event can be seen as a demonstration of four-year-olds learning to be responsive to the needs of others. In Peter's case, he has seen within the social organization of his classroom a way to meet his personal needs. The teacher encourages and aids him to use the class meeting for his own purposes. She has developed a method that everyone can use and an implicit set of guidelines for the appropriate use of the signal. Peter's problem is handled quickly and with a minimal amount of disruptiveness. Here the decision-making process is a group process, not an arbitrary one; as such, it requires class agreement. When a student runs counter to these group procedures, it is a social action rather than an individual one and has social consequences. Developing group responsibility is an important part of each child's social growth, and this tape segment demonstrates an effective way of contributing to this growth.

Discussing Transition: Problems and Solutions

This second section of the tape was filmed during a third grade class meeting. In general, topics of these class meetings center around problems the students themselves would like to examine. This specific gathering is to discuss what to do about messy transitions. The class has been dissatisfied with the way lining up and moving through the corridors has been happening. Their concerns vary from the role of the "line leader" to the lack of solidarity in appearance:

". . . and our class is all spread around, and it's not in a line or anything."

Descriptions such as the following confirm our observations about transitions. There is an increase in the amount of noise:

". . . when I was line leader . . . I was walking down the glass corridor and there was a lot of noise, so I stopped the line. . . ."

Jennifer comments on the increase in random movement:

"It's just a lot of people from different classes walking around in the hall. . . ."

During this discussion the teacher takes a role that might be described as a "conversational manager." Rather than instigating topics as she might during a lesson, she assigns turns at talking to individual students, keeps students on the topic at hand, maintains the circle formation and the necessary attention to the current speaker, and provides interim summaries of what has been covered. The complaints and solutions presented by the students seem to fall predominately into three categories. John sees the responsibility for controlling the behavior of certain students in line as a *teacher responsibility*. As a first guess, you might expect this to be the most common solution: an appeal to the authority figure, the teacher. However, the other students appear to lean toward solutions which call for either *individual* or *group responsibility*.

Peter: ". . . And I think everybody should take, um, take care of themselves. . . ."

Jennifer: "Well, really, when we come back from an activity, it's like we don't have a class. . . ."

Each of these positions has possibilities for resolving the problem. What is most important is that this active, voluntary participation indicates that students are aware of, concerned about, and interested in management issues such as these.

Activity in Its Own Right

This final, brief portion of the tape features Peter and his teacher in the nursery classroom again. The teacher has been sending the children, one by one, out of the room, and she has come up with a different series of things to do individually as they leave:

Touch the table three times, turn around twice, and walk from the room.
Go to the corner of the room, tap the wall twice, and jump through the door.
Hop to the edge of the rug and skip through the door.

Students eagerly await their own set of instructions; the teacher has clearly turned this transition into an "activity in its own right."

It appears that the teacher has discovered that Peter is not quite sure whether he wants to skip or for that matter whether he knows how to skip at all. Of course, this little exercise was not intended to gauge Peter's motor/physical coordination nor his knowledge of the meaning of "skip." Similar to the involvement of the third grade class members in discussion, these nursery students are actively engaged in doing—skipping, hopping, and jumping. These activities serve as a focus, to give meaning to what is going on and to infuse some fun into an arbitrary yet necessary procedure for change of locale. A point worth stressing is the reaction of both adults and children to "dead time." We all are too familiar with the boredom associated with arbitrary yet necessary activity, like waiting in line. We devise many ways to help pass the time; such as striking up a conversation with the person standing next to us. It is not surprising to find students doing the very same thing. Although marking time usually goes unnoticed, some of the ways we do it are suitable for any occasion, while others are restricted to certain settings. In the case of students chatting in line, there are many instances when the teacher would view this as inappropriate behavior.

The point is simple: Classroom rules and routines are too often established without student input or their understanding of why certain things are done one way and not another. Students comply with the rules primarily to stay out of trouble. An alternative might be to involve students in instituting these routines, so that compliance then stems from a positive sense of cooperation, participation, and mutual agreement. Unquestionably, energy expended on classroom management greatly increases at moments of transition. A source of energy (at times seemingly unlimited) is the class itself, and any way to harness that energy to conserve your own for teaching is a good idea.

EXERCISES

The following set of exercises is divided into two sections. In the first one, the exercises are based directly on the tape and transcript. The second section consists of general exercises. In both sections, the exercises may be done independently or as assignments in either a workshop or a class setting. While the exercises may be adapted to different workshop or class formats, many of them are best done with pencil and paper and a tape recorder.

The general purpose of these exercises is to focus and refine your understanding of the topic at hand, both through *observation* and *discussion* of the tape segments and through *application* of what is learned from these observations and discussions. It is *not* the purpose of the exercises to elicit criticism of the behavior of the children or the teachers seen on the tape.

I. EXERCISES BASED ON TAPE AND TRANSCRIPT MATERIAL

A. Signaling Transition with the Teacher's Signal

(1) Consider this portion of the tape and transcript. How would you describe the transition that occurs here? How and when does it begin? How and when does it end? What are some of the more noticeable characteristics of this transition?

(2) Examine the language used before, during, and after the transitional activity. Compare the role of the teacher's language with that of the students' language. Can transition language be characterized by any particular forms (such as, questions, commands, statements) or by any specific purposes (for example, obtaining information, calling attention, seeking clarification).

(3) Think about the *boop* sound. How would you describe its purpose and use? Can you think of other types of sounds or gestures that signal transition either in school or elsewhere?

(4) Describe this transition in terms of the teaching and learning goals of schooling. What are the students learning and the teacher accomplishing by means of transitional procedures such as this one?

(5) Consider what you do in your classroom when the need for this kind of transition arises. What do you do when confronted with needs such as Peter's? Assuming you made a decision similar to this teacher's, write down what you would say and do to accomplish the transition from one activity to the next. Look at the language you have written down. Would you say that you are using the transition time as an opportunity to do some teaching? If so, what is being learned or what can be learned?

(6) Make a copy of a daily class plan and list the scheduled activities down one side of the page. Leave a space between each of these activities in which to write down as complete a description as possible of the transitions that occur. For example:

Activity—science lesson	transition	Children begin to gather belongings; clock approaches appointed time; teacher begins to summarize lesson quickly and to repeat assignments and recommendations; utterances include:
Activity—recess		

This exercise can be done as you plan a day, as you record an ongoing day, or as you summarize a day's activities.

B. *Discussing Transition: Problems and Solutions*

(1) Consider this piece of transcript. What type of transition is being discussed? Isolate the utterances which describe this transition. What other topics are discussed and how do they relate to transition?

(2) Who seems to initiate the transition discussion? What reasons are given for talking about it? What are the students' expectations and concerns about how these transitions should be done and who should take responsibility for their execution?

(3) What roles does the teacher play in this discussion? How does she accomplish these tasks? Are these tasks found in all conversation, or are they special features of classroom conversation?

(4) Do you think that the children in your class would share some of the concerns of the students on the tape? What aspects of transition do your students discuss?

C. *Activity in Its Own Right*

(1) Re-examine this section of the transcript and tape. What do you think is happening? Why do you think the teacher does what she is doing?

(2) What do you think the teacher learns about Peter in particular and knows about transitions in general? Consider both what the teacher has asked him to do and the possible purposes for her instructions.

(3) In light of what happens during this brief episode and what you have learned from these materials, devise several alternative ways you might structure transitions appropriate for your own class. Remember to consider the characteristics of what preceded the transitions and what is to follow.

II. GENERAL EXERCISES

(1) For one entire day make a list of all of the signals you notice that accompany and accomplish transitions in everyday life—for example, traffic controls, ringing bells, signs.

(2) During the same day that you do Exercise 1, make a list of the verbal cues to transition that occur. For instance, notice how conversation is begun and ended or how topics are changed during discussion.

(3) How are transitions accomplished in the media? What happens between one television broadcast and the next, between one radio program and the next, or at a movie theater?

(4) Transitions are also an integral part of printed material. Consider, for example, the different forms that transitions take in this booklet. How does the format facilitate changes in topic, focus, and emphasis? Are the transitions in printed material markedly different from those you have noticed in oral language?

(5) How are telephone conversations different from other types of conversations with respect to transitions? Think about the obligations of the person who calls as opposed to the person called. For example, who has the right to initiate the closing of the conversation and what are some common words or phrases used?

(6) Are some of the transitions you have noted in the preceding exercises accomplished more successfully than others? In your judgment, how can "success" be defined? Is success in one instance necessarily success in another? Think about the role of flexibility of transitional strategies, especially how flexibility can be incorporated without losing orderliness.

THEORY AND METHODS

The information presented in this booklet results primarily from the work of two research disciplines: ethnography and sociolinguistics. Both of these fields share a common interest in examining the processes of education. For the ethnographer, education is seen from the standpoint of social organization and social-cultural development. For the sociolinguist, education is viewed from the perspective of language use and acquisition of language skills.

The following pages provide an overview of some of the assumptions and procedures that are used in these classroom investigations. This overview is offered for three reasons. First, the techniques of these research efforts may well provide you with alternative ways of looking at your own classroom situation. Second, with a better understanding of the investigators' goals and methods, you will be better equipped to evaluate critically their results and recommendations. Finally, as the person who actually does the educating, your insights, advice, and criticism are the best indication of areas where responsive research might turn its attention and focus its efforts.

Basic to the ethnographers' and sociolinguists' work is the belief that we interact in an orderly and systematic manner, with certain sets of "rules" which can be used to describe this orderliness.* Individually and collectively, we use our differing understandings of these same rules as we make our constant choices of what to do and say next. We also use these rules to understand what others do and say. By our behavior we are constantly answering the following questions for each other:

Who are you?
What is this place?
What is this time?
What is going on?

This information, used in conjunction with our notions of appropriateness, forms a large portion of our decision-making procedures.

When looking at a classroom, the ethnographer attempts to describe what it is that each member does and how it gets done. In ethnography it is essential that the description accurately reflect what the participants themselves perceive the activity to be. Taking the topic of transitions, we can retrace the steps that led to this analysis. The first step is to observe unobtrusively, over an extended period of time, students and teachers involved in transitional activity. In this study, the observational process was facilitated by videotape records available for re-examination. Once a sizable number of examples have been gathered (this study is based on over 150 such examples), the researcher establishes categories in which to group similar examples. These categories must be sufficiently detailed to cover every example that the observa-

*Theorists disagree as to how these "rules" originate in the individual and/or the society, but they generally agree that these "rules" are both conscious and unconscious in their usages and in their effects.

tions produce. Each category is then individually examined and described in detail. This ensures that it is representative of the behavior it is meant to capture. Interpretation follows categorization, as the observer answers the four questions previously stated.

Problems may and often do surface, so that the researcher returns to the original videotape records or conducts further observations. The entire procedure must be repeated until all the examples fit comfortably into a defined category. When this is completed, a *representative* description for that particular class during that particular time has been made. In order to claim a more *general* description, the researcher must examine other classes at other times. As similar results are found, the description can be generalized more and applied to other groups.

From reading this brief overview of the ethnographer's work, you might get the impression that in general people make "decisions" about what to do and stick by them. This is not true. Because we are social in nature and are always interacting with one another, our decisions are always undergoing modification and adaptation. We *negotiate* with each other in the same way that negotiations take place around the conference table. By expressing our individual needs through our actions, we arrive at social decisions and behave accordingly. Thus, we continually negotiate our rules and come to some "agreement" about what is happening. While we are interacting, this ongoing process is being repeated, taking into consideration new information about the people and the situation.

In our discussions throughout this booklet, we have referred to signals or cues for transition. Whether verbal or not, these cues are good examples of the kind of information we are constantly sending and receiving. For the sociolinguist interested in the language of transition, the research methodology is similar to that of the ethnographer. The sociolinguist focuses on the verbal elements of behavior by locating the language used before, during, and after transitional activity. Categorizing this language can be done along the following lines:

- Those utterances that share a common form (i.e. commands, questions, statements)
- Those utterances that share a common function (i.e. to get attention, to quiet the group, to give instructions)
- Those utterances that share a common content (i.e. address the same group, describe similar sequences of activity)
- Those utterances that share a common order (i.e. first attention, then silence, then instructions)

The utterances in each category may not be mutually exclusive. That is, utterances of a common function may also have a common form. Once the linguist has designed categories to organize the observed language usages, then these categories must be checked further. The description is useful only as it reflects what classroom members view and treat as meaningful themselves.

One way to check this is to watch how each person in the class responds to various types of utterances. Do the class members behave similarly after a given set of utterances? For instance, take the category of common function, where a group of utterances is classified as attention-getters. If all eyes are on the teacher after he or she uses any of these attention-getters, the

categorization looks valid. If, on another occasion, a student does not pay attention to the utterance and is reprimanded by the teacher, the category is further confirmed. The teacher has demonstrated the function of the utterance by letting the student know that something is wrong—i.e. the student's lack of attention. Categories also can be checked for accuracy by looking at what happened before the utterance, as well as looking at what happens after it. Again, take those utterances that share the common function of getting attention. It would throw some doubt on the category if teachers are observed using these attention-getters at times when the class is already paying attention. The sociolinguist looks at what is going on around, as well as during, the uses of language under investigation.

The outcome of the ethnographer's and sociolinguist's painstaking work is the description we offer here. Clearly our descriptive work carries with it some implicit suggestions for improving on what happens naturally in the classroom. Knowing what it is that people do and how they do it provides a firm grounding for educational innovation.

The concept of *negotiation* is central here. Children are often described as self-centered, and to a certain extent this is probably true. During early childhood, we are only infrequently confronted with social situations that parents don't control and negotiate for us. For most children formal schooling is their first major parent-free experience. While teachers provide much guidance and direction, it is largely up to the child to develop a sense of cooperative, appropriate behavior. This is essential both for the smooth operations of a classroom and for the individual child's growth and development. Transition times are particularly heavy times of cooperative negotiation. Efficient and effective changes of focus are also essential to productive use of learning time. Since transitions are unavoidable, they are a natural time to concentrate on social development by making them a group responsibility. Working with others toward a common goal while respecting the rights of others is fundamental to almost everything we do.

In addition to fostering and encouraging the social aspects of teaching, we must recognize the role social behavior may play in assessment of overall ability. Students' social behavior has been shown to have great significance on how we evaluate their academic as well as social skills. These evaluations, in turn, appear to influence decisions made concerning placement and advancement. The match or mismatch between what children bring to school as appropriate behavior and what a particular teacher or school in general considers appropriate is revealing information. It is crucial for us to be sensitive to adjustments that some children must make when confronted with an unfamiliar school setting. These adjustments may suggest ways that the classroom can take better advantage of what the children have already been taught and what they need to be taught.

GUIDELINES FOR TRANSCRIPTION

Several of the exercises in this manual require tape-recording and transcribing portions of conversation. The following are some basic guidelines for transcribing. A look at the transcript in this manual will also be useful.

(1) Decide how you will refer to each speaker, either by full name or by initial. Put this full name or initial in front of every new turn taken by that speaker.

Ann: Okay.
Melissa: Wait. Okay.
Ann: Measure—Do it again.

(2) In order to transcribe accurately everything a given speaker says, you may want to listen to a small segment, stop the tape, write down what you remember, and then listen to that segment again. Do not be surprised if what you *think* you hear and what is actually said are two different things. That is the reason for replaying difficult or quickly spoken segments. It may be helpful to listen to longer stretches on both sides of the troublesome sequence.

(3) Sometimes two people start talking at once, or one person interrupts another. This is usually shown in transcription with brackets marking the overlapping section:

Melissa: It's [as far out as] it can go.
Ann: [No, it might not be]

It is, of course, often difficult to hear what either speaker is saying in a case of overlap. As you can note, the continuing utterance of the person who keeps on talking after the overlap should be transcribed.

(4) Sometimes it is simply impossible to hear or understand what someone has said. This is dealt with by using square brackets; sometimes the word *unintelligible* is also included.

T: I'm going to [unintelligible] I'm going to go over to the listening center.

In other cases, you may not be entirely sure about a given word or sequence. This can be indicated as follows:

Pupil: I think we're gonna have some fun.

It may sometimes be impossible to tell who is talking. This can be indicated as follows:

(Unknown Speaker): I don't think so.

(5) There may be some information concerning nonverbal behavior or pauses that you want to include in your transcript. Parenthesis can be used for this:

Albert: Bambi.
Garnett: (shakes head "no")
Albert: What?
T: [unintelligible] (pause) Who is Dan talking to?
Pupils: (raise hands)

TAPE TRANSCRIPT

Transitions: Activity between Activities

This is a tape about transitions: the times when teachers and students go from one activity to the next. Although transition time is probably the most frequently occurring event of the school day, there is little descriptive work available on how transitions are accomplished, and little is mentioned in teacher preparation courses about transitions. During transition times in the classroom, everyone participates in some fashion, but it is mainly the teacher's responsibility to keep the day moving along smoothly with some sense of continuity. Most schools have some hard and fast rules about transition. Teachers develop some individual methods for dealing with these in-between times. Students likewise figure out or learn ways to keep themselves busy without breaking the rules.

When you're looking at this tape, please remember, it is harder to look at tapes of really occurring activities than at tapes of actors presenting a performance. Remember too that the eye and ear of the video equipment emphasize certain things that might not be noticed if you were present in the classroom. Most important, remember these are only short examples, and it is not reasonable to make judgments about the abilities or personalities of the teachers or the students.

Let's look closely at two pieces of videotape—the first from a nursery class, the second from a third grade classroom. Each tape will be repeated once, with some pointers given before the replay, to help you to focus on some of the interesting elements. First the nursery piece.

Signaling Transition with the Teacher's Signal

David: Now could I do that, Miss L.

Peter: Could I hang it up now?

T1: Um—Scott is next.

Peter: I'm gonna go and hang it up now.

T: [unintelligible]

Peter: I'm gonna hang it up.

T1: Could we show it at the first meeting we have, Peter, and then hang it up? Peter—we're going to hang it, honey, on the tree and—Peter, do you want to call a meeting? Alright.

Anita: I wanna show this to my mother.

T1: Let's do this quickly 'cause Peter's gonna call a meeting.

Peter: Boop! Boop!

T1: Oh dear—[he's already booped.] Pour it on now, real quickly.

Pupil: [Can I do one?]

Pupil: Can I do it after group?

T1: Yeah—did you hear the boop—did you hear Peter boop? What does that mean?

Pupil: That he . . .

Anita: Can I . . .

T1: Yes, you can take it with you but hold it carefully so you don't lose that because . . .

Pupil: Oh, I'm not finished.
(Various)

Anita: I want to have a boop too.

Pupils: Look what I got. Look what I got. Look what I got.
(Various)

Anita: Want me to tell you how I made it?

Peter: Boop! Boop!

Anita: You want me to tell you how I made it?

T1: Well, can you wait until everybody

Scott: Look, Miss C.

T2: Lemme see, Scott. Ooh, isn't that beautiful?

T1: Is everybody here? Here you come, Antonia. Good for you. Seth, [unintelligible] Peter called a meeting.

Peter: Look, some . . . came off.

T1: [unintelligible] honey, 'cause Seth is having trouble coming on his own. Here he comes. Seth is coming.

Peter: This is a star that I made and I'm gonna hang this star up on the Christmas tree.

(Replay Stops)

T1: Did somebody else make a star?

Pupil: Very beautiful.

Pupil: Me.

T2: That is pretty.

Pupil: Me.

T: Peter wanted to hang his star right away. And when we were at the . . . the Christmas show, we were talking about it and Peter wanted to do the same thing they did. So I sort of wanted to know whether or not everybody wanted to make a star and then everybody hang them the way they did in the Christmas show or whether or not you just want to make a star and put it on our tree to decorate it. Right now Peter was very anxious to get his star on the tree, so, if you can think about that

Eduardo: I tied my shoe all by myself . . .

This time through, note Peter's use of the *boop*, the teacher's reinforcement of its meaning, and the class' response to it.

Discussing Transition: Problems and Solutions

T: Lindsay?

Lindsay: Well, you see, like, some people are sitting about right here, like . . .

T: Uh hm.

Lindsay: And then some people are sitting back there. And the people who wanna get in first in line, sort of, when they say 'Line leader, come up,' the people sort of get up, so they're about to the edge about where that pencil sharpener is, . . .

T: Uh hm .

Lindsay: And then they just, when it's their turn, they sort of get like this, and then when it's—when they say 'line up,'

Willy: they just go [and then they / I think you] should just say 'line up' and the line leader . . .

T: Ssh.

Willy: [should / didn't] (raises hand)

T: You raise your hand. Samantha?

Samantha: Um, when like, when we're coming back from, uh, an activity by ourselves?

T: Uh hm.

Samantha: Um—the—nobody—everybody goes in front of the line leader and the line leader's often last in line.

Katie: Yeah.

T: Jennifer?

Katie: That's true.

Jennifer: Well, really, when we come back from an activity, it's like we don't have a class, but like, five people are over here all spread around, and five people are over here and then eight people are over here and it's like, it's just a lot of people from different classes walking around in the hall, and our class is all spread around, and it's not in a line or anything.

T: John, did you have something you wanted to say?

John: Yeah—I don't but Lindsay's right—what you should do is

Jennifer: [when / John, I can't hear you] people run up—to the door,

John: First the line leader and then the people who run up, they should—um, be put back to their, to their places.

T: Alright, so you're saying that I should be more aware of the people who are running in line. Does anybody else have any other solutions? Garnett?

Garnett: Well, I don't have a solution, but I have a problem, because when I was line leader, a lot of . . . I was walking down the glass corridor and there was a lot of noise, so I stopped the line—and every—and people are—like so-and-so is pushing me to say 'go on, open the door?' Stuff like that.

Jennifer: I know. But, Peter . . .

T: Un-uh. Un-uh. Peter?

Peter: Um—the first reason—the first thing

T: [I wanted / Willy, if you] don't sit back in the line, I can't see

Peter: to say I'm . . . I'm not so . . I don't know if people want, I mean, if everybody's talking about these guys are butting in, they're getting in line and everything, do these—um—do they wanna get in? Do the people they're talking about—do they wanna get in the front of the line too sometimes?

Lindsay: No, they just want

Peter: [it to stop / OK, then] if they do, then why do they *care*? If they don't wanna get in front of the line, then why do they go? And I think everybody should take, um, take care of themselves. And also—and sometimes a lot of people say just stop the line. But a lot of times, if someone stops the line, they're not just—they're still not gonna do it. They're still not gonna stop, so, maybe you should just—maybe just keep on going and just take care of your—take care of yourself.

T: What do you think are the solutions to this problem? John?

This time, notice how the student discussion is centered around social and personal responsibility. Notice, too, that the teacher participates only in regulating the conversation and in helping to formulate the solution.

Activity Between Activities? Activity in Its Own Right

T: Hop to the edge of the rug and skip through the door.

Peter: [Hop?

T: Can you skip?] Hop. Do you know how to hop on one foot? What are you going to do next? Skip through the door. You wanna jump—you wanna jump with both feet?

Peter: This way or that way?

T: That's the way. That's the way.